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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 001719

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAO](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [PTER](#)
SUBJECT: MUTED PALESTINIAN REACTION TO POTUS SEPTEMBER 23
UN SPEECH

REF: JERUSALEM 1717

Classified By: Acting Principal Officer Greg Marchese
for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Summary: Despite positive public comments by PA leadership in local media following President Obama's September 23 UNGA speech, mid-level Fatah contacts told Post that, while they welcomed the President's references to Palestinian statehood and the illegitimacy of continued settlement activity, the perceived "failure" of the preceding day's trilateral meeting overshadowed the speech. Hamas spokesmen and Post contacts in the Israeli settler community had a stronger reaction, rejecting the speech's formulations outright. End Summary.

FATAH OFFICIALS: SPEECH OVERSHADOWED BY TRILATERAL MEETING

2. (C) While senior Palestinian negotiators praised President Obama's September 23 speech in public comments reported by local press (Reftel), mid-level Fatah officials in the West Bank and Gaza told Post that their generally positive response to the speech's treatment of Israeli-Palestinian issues was overshadowed by disappointment that the previous day's U.S.-Israeli-Palestinian trilateral meeting had failed to achieve tangible results. Gaza-based Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) delegate and Fatah Revolutionary Council (FRC) member Faisal Abu Shahla told Post, in an oft-heard refrain, "Palestinians have high expectations from the Obama Administration. But we are waiting for actions beyond the words." He encouraged the USG to "stand up to Netanyahu," and "not be afraid of conflict."

3. (C) Bethlehem-based PLC delegate Fuad Koakli echoed similar themes. "The speech was balanced in words," he said, "but the approach so far is lacking in action." Koakli said he "liked what he heard" on settlements, the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the status of East Jerusalem, but that the USG needed to "relinquish its traditionally supportive relationship" with Israel and hold both parties to the same standard. "It's not as if we want Jaffa back," he said, "just the 1967 borders." Koakli was pessimistic about the outcome of the September 22 trilateral meeting, saying "the meeting weakened Abbas, because he is perceived as giving into pressure -- and it indicates the United States is not serious about pressuring Israel."

4. (C) Jerusalem-based FRC member Hatem Abdel Qader said the President's speech was "nice talk," but that the USG "still lacks the serious political will to pressure Israel to deliver what it takes to reach an agreement." Abdel Qader

was critical of the trilateral, saying, "afterwards, it was proven that the pressure applied by the U.S. on Abu Mazen was unjustified. Most people believe that the peace process is facing a serious setback." Ramallah Fatah District Committee member Hassan Shteivi concurred, saying, "there is no doubt that President Obama's talk is very appealing. But the big question mark now is about his ability to push the Israelis to agree to the principles and goals of the peace process."

15. (C) The head of the Fatah Youth Organization in the West Bank Ahmad Ebwaini, took a dark view of events in New York, telling Post, "there is no hope of reaching an agreement with the current Israeli government." He was also critical of PA leadership, saying, "Abu Mazen simply fools himself, and the people also, if he thinks anyone will believe there was any progress." Ebwaini noted that in his view, if the USG "did not move quickly to end the rapid political deterioration, things could spin up to bad consequences." He dismissed talk of incremental progress, saying, "the only tangible outcome (of the trilateral and speech) is a big failure," which would damage the PA and enhance Hamas' credibility.

HAMAS, SETTLER ACTIVISTS CRITICIZE SPEECH'S LANGUAGE

16. (SBU) Hamas spokesman Tahir al-Nunu was predictably critical of the speech, speaking of his "astonishment" that the USG would refer to "the Jewish nature of Israel" at the UNGA, and terming settlement activity "a war crime, and not merely a hindrance to the peace process." Post's contacts among Israeli settlers in the West Bank were equally critical. Israeli-American Shilo resident and blogger

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Yisrael "Winky" Medad's comments were characteristic: "O take umbrage," Medad said, "at the characterization of President Obama of my residential community as 'illegitimate.' More than 'illegal,' that term conveys to me a sense of moral repugnancy which I find hard to accept."

17. (C) Medad continued, "For Mr. Obama to term the situation of Jews living in their homeland as distinct from any eventual political resolving of the conflict as 'illegitimate' is wrong, is mean-spirited, and simply invites further Arab attempts to kill us, to dislodge us from our homes...I was quite disappointed." Ron Nachman, Mayor of Ariel settlement, was more blunt. "The President listens to Rahm Emmanuel and those left-(wing) peaceniks," Nachman said. "They mislead the President. I want to tell Mr. President that he is not doing anything new, and the whole process will not succeed. I would like to invite him to Ariel, and for him to bring with him Abu Mazen from the Palestinian side. I want to host (negotiations) here in Ariel, instead of the Waldorf Astoria."

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